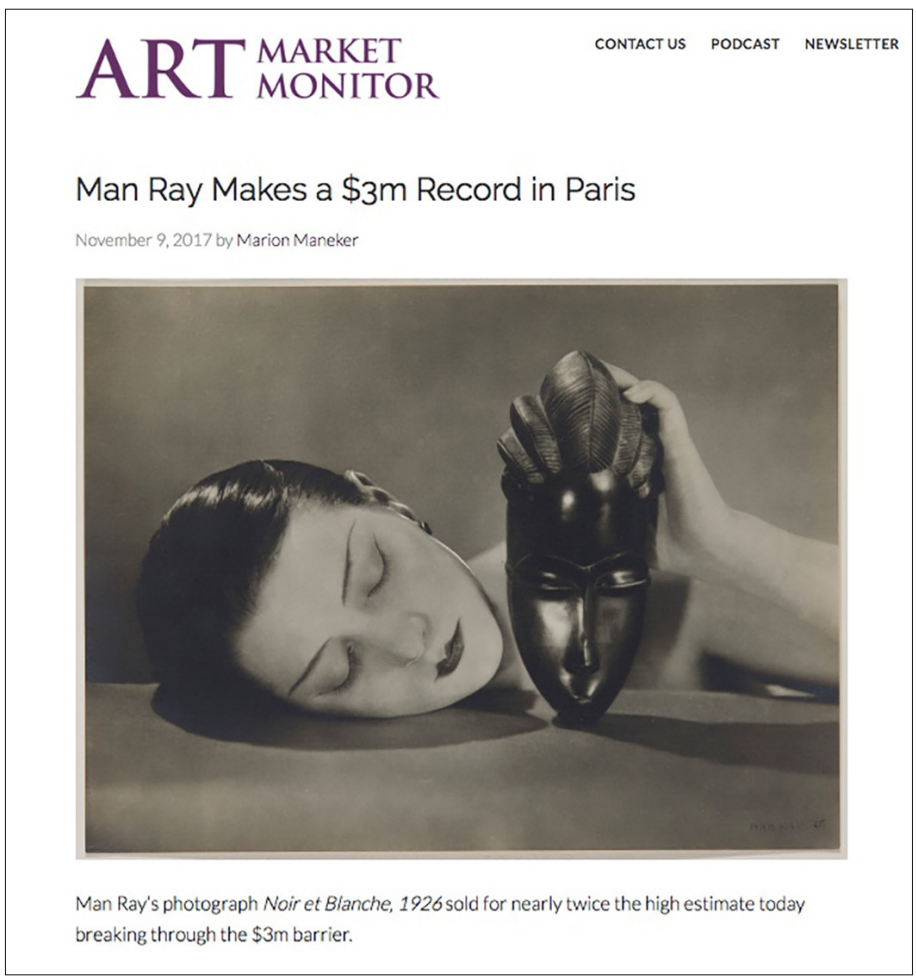


100 Man Ray, *Noire et blanche*, 1926. Auction result on *Art Market Monitor*, 2017.

Surrealism and the Marketing of Man Ray's Photographs in America: The Medium, the Message, and the Tastemakers

Wendy A. Grossman

On November 9, 2017, a print of Man Ray's *Noire et blanche* set a remarkable $3,125,483.66 record at Christie's auction in Paris, selling for nearly twice its high estimate (fig. 100). It was not only a record for the artist's work in the photographic medium but also for the sale at auction of any vintage photograph. Even as the provenance of this record-breaking photographic print inevitably contributed to establishing its extraordinary value at market—it was initially owned by the preeminent Parisian fashion designer and estimable collector Jacques Doucet—various prints of this work have continued to climb to the top of photography auction sales over the course of the past several decades, indicating a definite trend.[1]

The secure place of *Noire et blanche* in the pantheon of twentieth-century photography long predated this record-breaking sale. Featured in the 2005 publication *Photo Icons: The Story Behind the Pictures*, the work was classified as "one of the most sought-after treasures in the international photographic trade."[2] With a dozen or so known authenticated vintage prints of this iconic composition in both institutional and pri-

1 I want to express my appreciation to Francis Naumann and Edouard Sebline for their valuable input and encouragement throughout the development of this essay. Thanks also to Steven Manford and Andrew Strauss for taking the time to read and comment on an earlier version, and to Martha Bari for her editorial contributions.

On the history of this photograph, see Wendy A. Grossman and Steven Manford, "Unmasking Man Ray's *Noire et blanche*," *American Art*, Summer 2006, pp. 134–147; and Wendy A. Grossman, "(Con)Text and Image: Reframing Man Ray's *Noire et blanche*," in Alex Hughes and Andrea Noble, eds., *Phototextualities. Intersections of Photography and Narrative* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2003), pp. 119–135.

2 Hans-Michael Koetzle, *Photo Icons. The Story Behind the Pictures* (Cologne: Taschen, 2005), p. 161. Koetzle also notes that *Noire et blanche* was selected for inclusion in Klaus Honnef's 1992 exhibition, "Pantheon der Photographie im XX. Jahrhundert" in Bonn, Germany, cat. exh. (Stuttgart: Gerd Hatje, 1992).

vate hands, it indeed remains a perennial market favorite on those few opportunities when one surfaces for sale.[3]

Like *Noire et blanche*, Man Ray's "rayographs"—the cameraless photographs discovered by chance in his Paris darkroom—have found great success in the modern art market. The signed 1922 rayograph of a spiraling coil and wine glass that sold for $1,203,750 in 2013 was the first of Man Ray's photographs to break the million-dollar mark at auction. This record held until 2017 when two other photographs—including a print of *Noire et blanche*—left that record in the dust.[4]

Sensational auction records of *Noire et blanche* and individual rayographs notwithstanding, reading those results in terms of their significance for the reception of surrealism in the United States is not a simple endeavor. The works' complex positioning between discourses since their inception and the multi-dimensional creative practice of the protean artist make it impossible to neatly categorize under any rubric either the photographs or the artist. Moreover, the vagaries of photographs at market (vintage vs. modern prints, signed vs. unsigned, rarity,

3 Vintage prints in museum collections include: the Baltimore Museum of Art (BMA 1988.422); the National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne (PH137-1983); the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston (2002.1577); the Museum of Modern Art, New York (132.1941); the Israel Museum, Jerusalem (O.S.B77.0006); and the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam (FA 1870). The best-known print in a private collection belongs to Elton John, who also owns one of the even rarer negative, tonally reversed prints of this composition. On John's collection, see Dawn Ades et al., *The Radical Eye. Modernist Photography from the Elton John Collection* (London: Tate Publishing, 2016). A vertically-oriented variant is in the collection of the Getty Museum (86.XM.626.15). Auction records of other vintage prints include: Martin Gordon, New York, May 10, 1977, lot 1011; "Kiki of Montparnasse with African mask," Sotheby's London, March 22, 1978, lot 261; "Kiki and an African Sculpture," Sotheby's Los Angeles, February 6–7, 1980, lot 763; "Kiki and the African mask," Christie's East, New York, November 12, 1980, lot 304; and "Kiki and African Mask," Sotheby's New York, May 25, 1982, lot 444. The photograph began making headlines in 1994 with the earliest auction sale of the Doucet-owned print; bringing in $354,500, the photograph sold at nearly twice the high estimate. Auction sales of other prints of this image have raised the bar at regular intervals ever since. A diptych of positive and negative prints of *Noire et blanche* sold at Christie's New York for $607,500 on October 5, 1998, making it the most expensive vintage photographic sale at auction before 1999. Source: "Artnet Top Ten," *artnet*, April 25, 2003, http://www.artnet.com/Magazine/news/topten/topten4-25-03.asp, accessed November 18, 2017. As a point of comparison, prior to setting that record, the most expensive photograph sold at auction was Alfred Stieglitz's *Georgia O'Keeffe: A Portrait—Hands and Thimble*, which sold for $398,500 at Christie's New York on October 8, 1993. See "Stieglitz Photograph Brings Record Price," *New York Times*, October 9, 1993, http://www.nytimes.com/1993/10/09/arts/stieglitz-photograph-brings-record-price.html, accessed November 18, 2017. Only one other work by Man Ray in any medium has commanded more at auction than the price captured by the recent sale of *Noire et blanche*. His 1916 canvas *Promenade* sold for $5,877,000 on November 6, 2013, at the Sotheby's New York Impressionist & Modern Art Sale, lot #00008. Even modern prints of *Noire et blanche* have had a modicum of success at auction, despite the cloud of apprehension raised by recent scandals over such works. Scandals concerning the authenticity of modern prints have shaken but not totally disrupted interest in Man Ray's photographs. A posthumous print of *Noire et blanche*, printed in 1993, sold at auction in 2007 for $15,213, more than twice the high estimate of $6,708. On scandals over authenticity, stamps, and posthumous prints, see Steven Manford, "Lost Trust: The legacy of Man Ray continues in turmoil," *Art on Paper*, November/December 2007, pp. 43–44.

4 "The Delighted Eye. Modernist Masterworks From a Private Collection," Christie's New York, April 4, 2013. Lot 00017.

quality, provenance, stamp authentication, print size, and extrinsic factors, such as the health of the economy or the whims of collectors at a particular time of sale) make assessing the market for this artist's photographs more of an art than a science.

The text that follows traces the trajectory of these photographs at the nexus of histories of photography, surrealism, and institutional collecting practices in the United States. In the process, it offers new insights into how such photographs, which made their debuts not in the context of the surrealist movement or the reified art world but rather on the pages of fashion magazines, were purged of the "taint" of commercialism historically burdening similar endeavors and came to be held in such esteem. This exploration of the multiple factors and specific tastemakers, mediating agents, and institutions that helped shape the reception of, and market for, Man Ray's photographs in the United States provides a sociological study and historiography of sorts, revealing how shifting attitudes towards the medium as an art form and other elements have impacted the market for his work and continue to do so today.

A *faute*grapher at large

Created in the 1920s, Man Ray's *Noire et blanche* and his rayographs faced similar challenges in the art market from the outset. Unlike works of art in other mediums, there was in the early twentieth century virtually no art market for photography in Europe or the United States, despite the diligent efforts spearheaded by impresarios such as the photographer and connoisseur Alfred Stieglitz.[5] While individuals in the European vanguard circles in which Man Ray circulated—such as André Breton, Tristan Tzara, and Peggy Guggenheim—eagerly acquired his photographs, the world was not ready to think of work in this medium as collectable commodities or objects with much intrinsic monetary value. Even the artist's celebrity portraits suffered as commodifiable objects. Discussing this matter in his autobiography, Man Ray noted, "There was no question of payment, of course. As Gertrude Stein said to me, we were all artists, hard up."[6]

Until the conceit of the "vintage" image was established in the 1970s, the devaluation of photography remained well-entrenched. The unsurmountable challenges art dealer Julien Levy famously faced in his

5 See Robert Doty, *Photo-Secession. Stieglitz and the Fine-Art Movement in Photography* [1960] (New York: Dover, 1978); William Innes Homer, *Alfred Stieglitz and the Photo-Secession* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1983); *Truth Beauty, Pictorialism and the Photograph as Art, 1845–1945*, Thomas Padon, ed., exh. cat. (Vancouver: Vancouver Art Gallery, 2008).

6 Man Ray, *Self Portrait* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1963), p. 131.

attempts to promote surrealism and sell photographs in his New York gallery in the decades following its opening in 1931 are a case in point.[7] While surrealism in any medium was still a hard sell to the American public at that time, photographs within that realm faced an even more forceful headwind. Prior to the exhibition of photographs from Levy's donated collection at the Art Institute of Chicago in the winter of 1976–77, photography had been so devalued that the noted gallerist admitted, "you should have seen how my photographs were stored for many years. In the barn, amid manure."[8]

However, in order to fully appreciate the historical shift that bolstered the art market success that *Noire et blanch*e and the rayographs now enjoy, we need to better understand the contexts and processes through which these works acquired their status and surrealist imprimaturs. Coming of age as an artist in New York in the 1910s, Man Ray was exposed to, and assimilated, a wide range of ideological approaches to modern art that would prime him for the heterogeneous practice he would develop. Although his photographic activities established his avant-garde credentials within Dada and surrealist circles and elicited his greatest acclaim, he looked upon the medium as just one more tool in a creative arsenal that embraced any means through which he could engage in creating inventive expressions. When Man Ray resettled in Paris in 1921 at the age of thirty-one, his photographic skills became indispensable; they not only provided a means to make a living but also filled a void in creative photographic activities in the city and burnished his international reputation at the intersection of the Dada and surrealist movements.

With a hybrid creative practice cross-fertilized by his commercial and fine art activities and a transatlantic career between France and the United States, he occupied a unique space in twentieth-century art history that presaged the eclectic practice of many artists today. Man Ray's iconoclastic stance toward the reification of photography as an art form and his characteristically irreverent attitude toward issues of authenticity, authority, and originality set him apart from his contemporaries in

7 See Julien Levy, *Memoir of an Art Gallery* (Boston: MFA Publications, 2003); *Dreaming in Black and White. Photography at the Julien Levy Gallery*, Katherine Ware and Peter Barbarie, eds., exh. cat. (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 2006).

8 Julien Levy, quoted in Nancy Hall-Duncan, "Surrealist Photography at The New Gallery. Conversation with Julien Levy," *Dialogue* no. 2 (September–October 1979), p. 23. Commenting in 1978 on this shift in the valuation of photography, art critic Hilton Kramer noted, "One of the most striking developments in the recent history of the visual arts in this country has been the elevation of photography to an exalted status. … Frequently reduced to an ancillary role in the arts … photography has now been welcomed to the aesthetic sanctum of our culture on a scale that even its most devoted champions of an earlier day might have hesitated to predict." Hilton Kramer, "The New American Photography," *New York Times Magazine*, July 23, 1978, pp. 9, 11. Cited in Sandra Zalman, "Another Lens. Surrealism, Photography and Postmodernism," in *Consuming Surrealism in American Culture. Dissident Modernism* (Farnham/Burlington: Ashgate Publishing, 2015), pp. 143–176, here pp. 152–153.

the United States in the first decades of the century. He took great delight in circumventing aesthetic conventions upon which photography had modeled itself, expressing his belief that "a certain amount of contempt for the material employed is indispensable to express the purest realization of an idea."[9] He was, in his own words, a "*faute*grapher."[10] Paradoxically, Man Ray's unorthodox approach toward photography has both fueled and confounded the market for his work in this medium.

Within the elite circle of modern art aficionados drawn to Stieglitz's renowned gallery at 291 Fifth Avenue in New York where photography was promoted as fine art, Man Ray's unconventional approach to the medium and to art-making in general was not warmly received. His free spirit and Dada ethos enjoyed a much more enthusiastic response in Paris, where he relocated in 1921. The discrepancy between Man Ray's reception in Europe and the United States is evident in comments by the Mexican-born caricaturist, art critic, art dealer, and early Stieglitz collaborator Marius de Zayas. Replying from Paris in 1922 to an invitation to contribute to an upcoming issue of Stieglitz's journal *Manuscripts*, he wrote, "I have been thinking a lot about photography on account of the false success that Man Rae [*sic*] has made here among the 'intellectuals.' … And I must say that outside of what you and Sheeler have done in photography I find the rest quite stupid."[11]

Man Ray, in turn, feigned indifference to the lack of appreciation for his work in the Stieglitz circle. Learning from his American patron Ferdinand Howald of his exclusion from the exhibition "A Collection of Works by Living American Artists of the Modern Schools" that Stieglitz mounted at his Anderson Galleries in New York City in February 1922, the artist responded, "The Stieglitz sale does not mean anything to me—I am delighted not to have been in it." In a thinly veiled appeal for continued patronage, Man Ray professed, "If I could make an income and have a couple [of] friends to enthuse with me over ideas and things, I should never enter the art market, and never exhibit."[12]

Having left New York for Paris "under a cloud of misunderstanding and distrust," as he would later write, Man Ray's resentment toward the lack of appreciation for his work in the United States, not only for his photography but also for what he felt was his most important métier—painting—expressed itself in a strong ambivalence about alle-

9 Man Ray, "L'Âge de la Lumière," *Minotaure*, no. 2–3, 1933, reprinted in Man Ray, *Photographs by Man Ray 1920 Paris 1934* (Hartford, CT: James Thrall Soby; Paris: Cahiers d'Art, 1934).

10 Man Ray, quoted by Levy, *Memoir of an Art Gallery* (note 7), p. 256.

11 Letter from De Zayas to Stieglitz, August 3, 1922, ALS, Stieglitz Papers, YCAL. Cited in Marcus de Zayas, *How, When, and Why Modern Art Came to New York*, Francis M. Naumann, ed. (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1998), p. 208.

12 Letter from Man Ray to Ferdinand Howell, April 5, 1922. Reproduced in Jennifer Mundy, ed., *Man Ray. Writings on Art* (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2016), p. 78.

giance to his American identity throughout his life.[13] This ambivalence and chameleon-like attitude toward his homeland further confounded the historical reception of his work in the United States.[14] The benign neglect, indifference, or outright dismissal with which Man Ray's work has traditionally been treated in histories of American art until recently have also served to undermine a full appreciation of his contributions to the embrace of surrealist art in the United States.[15] The far more appreciative French have long been happy to claim him as their own, which has undoubtedly influenced the artist's ambiguous place in modernist narratives conventionally constructed along national lines.

Rayographs forging a collector's market

Ironically, a year after his departure for Paris, a full-page illustrated article in the November 1922 issue of *Vanity Fair* brought Man Ray the attention in his home country that until then had proved so elusive. Titled "A New Method of Realizing the Artistic Possibilities of Photography," the article featured the artist's recently created rayographs (fig. 101) and a small portrait. The bold subtitle reads, "Experiments in Abstract Form, Made Without a Camera Lens, by Man Ray, the American Painter."[16] The text below the artist's portrait concludes with a translated excerpt from the French poet and playwright Jean Cocteau's effusive description of Man Ray's images as "meaningless masterpieces in which are realized the most voluptuous velvets of the aquafortist. There has never been anything like this scale of blacks sinking into each other, of shadows and half shadows. He has come to set painting free again." One can only imagine how pleased (and perhaps somewhat smug) the artist felt by the exposure and accolades. He was undoubtedly gratified that he was identified as a painter, and a well-known one at that.

The story of Man Ray's rediscovery in his Paris darkroom of the cameraless image—famously rebaptized in his own image as a "rayograph"—is legend. Less well known are the roots in fashion that these elusive images share with *Noire et blanche.* Indeed, the fortuitous accident that gave birth to the rayograph occurred while the artist was printing photographs from

13 Man Ray, *Self Portrait* (note 6), p. 323.

14 On Man Ray's chameleon-like national identity, see Dickran Tashjian, "Man Ray on the Margins," in *A Boatload of Madmen. Surrealism and the American Avant-Garde 1920–1950* (New York: Thames & Hudson, 1995), pp. 91–109.

15 On the marginalization of Man Ray in American art-historical accounts, see Francis Naumann, *Conversion to Modernism. The Early Work of Man Ray* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2003), pp. xvi–xvii.

16 "A New Method of Realizing the Artistic Possibilities of Photography," *Vanity Fair*, November 1922, p. 50.

his shoot for the fashion designer Paul Poiret. Recounting in his autobiography the immense joy and playful attitude with which he began to explore the creative potential of the process he associated with his childhood experiments with sun prints, Man Ray wrote, "This was the same idea, but with an added three-dimensional quality and tone graduation. I made a few more prints, setting aside the more *serious* [emphasis mine] work for Poiret, using up my precious paper."[17]


50 VANITY FAIR

"A Comb Entering the Gyroscope"—a delicate and finely patterned abstract study in white, gray and black

"Imitation of the Gyroscope by the Magnifying Glass, Assisted by a Pin." Note the contrasts of light and shade

MAN Ray—the well-known American painter now living in Paris and closely allied with the modern school of French art—has recently been experimenting along new lines with the artistic possibilities of photography. These "rayographs", as he calls them, are made, without the aid of a camera lens, by interposing the objects photographed between the light, which is made to fall upon them in a certain way, and a sheet of sensitive paper.—Jean Cocteau, the French critic, has written of these prints that they are "meaningless masterpieces,in which are realized the most voluptuous velvets of the aquafortist. There has never been anyone else who has been able to produce anything like this scale of blacks sinking into each other, of shadows and half shadows? He has come to set painting free again. His mysterious groups are infinitely better than any of the ordinary still-lifes which attempt to conquer the flat canvas and the elusive mud of the colors."

A Torn Letter, a Spool of Wire and a Watch Fob—a full and curiously satisfying photographic composition

"Composition of Objects Selected with Both Eyes Closed." This suggests the modern artistic passion for machinery

A New Method of Realizing the Artistic Possibilities of Photography

Experiments in Abstract Form, Made without a Camera Lens, by Man Ray, the American Painter

101 "A New Method of Realizing the Artistic Possibilities of Photography," in *Vanity Fair*, November 1922.

Poiret was instantly intrigued by the novel prints Man Ray slipped into the fashion photographs he delivered a few days later. As the artist explained to the designer, "I was trying to do with photography what painters were doing, but with light and chemicals, instead of pigment, and without the optical help of the camera."[18] Although Poiret met

17 Man Ray, *Self Portrait* (note 6), p. 131.
18 Ibid.

Man Ray's timid request for remuneration for the fashion photographs with surprise—"he never paid for photographs and [said] photographers considered it a privilege to work in his house"—the designer happily purchased two rayographs. Accepting "some 100-franc notes from [Poiret's] pocket," the artist was, in his own words "elated. I had never received so much money for my more commercial work."

The fashion connection didn't end there. Among the early aficionados of the rayographs was Frank Crowninshield, the famously art-loving editor of *Vanity Fair.* Under his leadership, the publication had become the premiere magazine combining fashion and art.[19] Clearly taken by these ethereal images and ambiguous compositions hovering between representation and abstraction, he selected four for the article published shortly after his visit to Man Ray's studio. A regular visitor to Paris, Crowninshield was not only the editor of *Vanity Fair* but also a founding board member of New York's Museum of Modern Art. Following his death in 1947, the *New York Times* crowned him "*arbiter elegantiarum* in every field that his ceaseless and urbane activity touched."[20] As such, his excitement about Man Ray's unpredictable images with their lush tonalities and enigmatic floating forms undoubtedly provided added cachet to the work. In a letter to his American patron Ferdinand Howald on May 28, 1922, Man Ray recounted Crowninshield's enthusiastic response to the results of his self-proclaimed technique of "working with light itself" and expressed his delight over the eager reception of his images that had brought new currency to the largely forgotten cameraless process he employed.[21]

The enthusiastic reception of the rayographs was further reflected in some of the earliest exhibitions of Man Ray's photographic work in the United States, where selections of these compositions were featured. This included exhibits staged in New York by the Société Anonyme (1926), the Daniel Gallery (1927), the Art Center (1931), the Brooklyn Museum (1932), and two exhibitions at the Julien Levy Gallery (1932). Outside of New York, they were displayed at the Arts Club of Chicago (1929), the Wadsworth Atheneum in Hartford, Connecticut (1934), and the Art Center School, Los Angeles (1935).[22]

---

19 See Amy Fine Collins, "Vanity Fair. The Early Years, 1914–1936," October 10, 2006, https://www.vanityfair.com/magazine/2006/10/earlyyears, accessed March 20, 2018.

20 "Frank Crowninshield, *New York Times*, December 30, 1947, p. 22.

21 In a letter to his American patron Ferdinand Howald dated May 28, 1922, Man Ray writes, "It is only a month [since] I've begun to show my things to people who come to see me, and have sold about 12, not including 4 which *Vanity Fair* have taken for a page. Crowninshield the editor came to see me last week and was very enthusiastic." Ferdinand Howald Correspondence, Rare Books and Manuscripts Library, The Ohio State University, Columbus, OH. Reproduced in Mundy, *Man Ray* (note 12), p. 82.

22 See list of exhibitions in which rayographs were included in Emmanuelle de l'Écotais, *Man Ray rayographies* (Paris: Éditions L. Scheer, 2002), pp. 282–283. The exhibitions at the Art Center in

Man Ray's fugitive rayographs found not only a receptive audience but also—in contrast to his other photographic activities—encouraging signs of an incipient market. In the correspondence with Howald cited above, the artist added, "It is only a month [since] I've begun showing my [rayographs] to people who come to see me, and I have already sold about twelve, not including four which *Vanity Fair* has taken for a page." He continues in the missive to discuss the possibility of arranging a show in New York in the fall, noting that his "things [rayographs] are not expensive—they should bring from $25 to $50 apiece."[23] A decade later, he would sell a large-format rayograph for eighty dollars to James Thrall Soby, the author, collector, curator, and patron of the arts who would soon prove to be instrumental in the next phase of Man Ray's career.[24] And in 1940, Peggy Guggenheim purchased four rayographs for $27.50 each.[25]

Man Ray acknowledged in a 1970 interview with the photographer and collector Arnold Crane that he continued to make a few rayographs into the 1950s and 1960s. However, he no longer had any in his possession since, "in the last ten years … the Rayographs really found a collectors' market."[26] In an interview with Crane only two years earlier, the artist offered to sell some to his visitor for one hundred dollars each.[27] Almost a decade later—a year after the artist's death in 1976—they were being sold through a New York gallery for between $3,500 and $5,000 a print.[28] When a rayograph sold for $126,500 in 1990, it was the highest amount paid at auction for a single photograph at the time, further fueling the market demand for these ethereal works.[29]

Although each rayograph is unique—enhancing its market value—Man Ray quickly found a way to expand the financial return for his efforts by photographing the images for the purpose of replication. In 1922, he produced *Champs Délicieux* (Delicious Fields), a limited-edi-

---

New York and the Wadsworth Atheneum are incorrectly dated in de l'Écotais's listing.

23 Ibid.

24 Letter from Man Ray to Julien Levy, February 10, 1933. Reprinted in Mundy, *Man Ray* (note 12), p. 107. In the letter, Man Ray thanked Levy for introducing him to Soby. After recounting the sale of the rayograph for eighty dollars, he added, "I enclose a cheque for twenty, to support American photography or whatever you like."

25 "Art of this Century Inventory," reproduced in Mary V. Dearborn, *Mistress of Modernism. The Life of Peggy Guggenheim* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2004), p. 321.

26 Man Ray, interview by Arnold Crane, January 1970. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC (hereafter cited as AAA).

27 Man Ray, interview by Arnold Crane, October 1968, AAA.

28 *Man Ray. Vintage Photographs, Solarizations and Rayographs* (New York: Kimmel/Cohn Photography Arts, 1977), laid-in price list.

29 See Rita Reif, "Auctions," *New York Times*, April 12, 1991, p. C28. In the article's section headed "Rayographs in Demand," Reif noted that the record-breaking sale of a rayograph in the otherwise lackluster photo sales the previous fall fueled the market demand for these unique works.

tion portfolio of twelve tipped-in-gelatin silver prints made from those negatives. The signed and numbered volumes in paper wrappers of various colors were issued in an edition of forty copies. Tristan Tzara, who had been among the first to see Man Ray's rayograph experiments, contributed the preface, *La photographie à l'envers*, in which he celebrated the works as "projections surprised in transparence … of things that dream and talk in their sleep." Borrowing from the strategies of printmakers and making his singular works more accessible (and marketable) in this replicated format, Man Ray created what has become a seminal publication in the worlds of book art and photography. Even as Man Ray's original rayographs continue to draw competitive bidding and command significant prices at auction, so too do the twelve gelatin silver prints Man Ray made from negatives of the originals and compiled in these albums. As a measure of the continuing value of the portfolios today, four of the numbered editions that came up for auction since 1999 have attracted strong interest. The volume auctioned in 1999 (signed edition 25/40) sold for $183,720, while the album up for sale in 2014 (signed edition 34/40) sold for $281,000.[30]

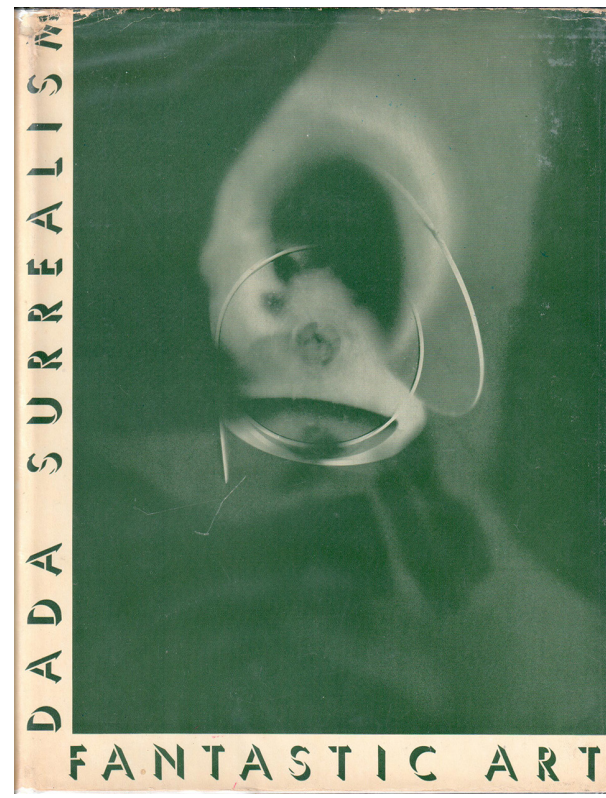
The surrealist imprimatur

Despite Tzara's effusive embrace of the illusory rayographs at the time of their creation as "pure Dada creations,"[31] their dreamlike qualities, projected illusions of depth and time, estrangement of objects from context, and reliance on chance juxtapositions also made them surrealist expressions *avant la lettre*. The rayographs were furthermore infused with new significance in the context of the surrealist movement, which embraced photographic activities wherein the medium was used to sabotage or subvert its ostensibly faithful transcriptive or indexical quality. Subsequent to the reproduction of a rayograph in *La Révolution Surréaliste* (April 25, 1925) illustrating an article dedicated to "The Activity of the Surrealist Research Bureau," a number of writers commented on these works as expressive of central preoccupations of surrealist thought.[32]

30 "La Photographie. Collection Marie-Thérèse et André Jammes." Sotheby's London, October 27, 1999, Lot 00247; "Photographs." Sotheby's New York, April 2, 2014, Lot 00108. Auction records from "The Price Database," *artnet*, https://www.artnet.com/price-database/, accessed November 11, 2017.

31 Tristan Tzara, cited in Man Ray, *Self Portrait* (note 6), p. 129.

32 *La Révolution Surréaliste*, April 25, 1925, p. 31. Breton, Louis Aragon, Robert Desnos, and Georges Ribemont-Dessaignes all addressed the surrealist qualities of the rayographs. See "Man Ray," in *Peggy Guggenheim Collection, Venice*, Angelica Zander Rudenstine, ed. (New York: Harry N. Abrams and the Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, 1985), pp. 489–490.



102 Cover of the catalogue for the exhibition "Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism," 1936.

The surrealist imprimatur the rayographs acquired in Paris was assimilated into the reception of these inventive compositions across the Atlantic. This was reflected in their appearance in a series of influential exhibitions and publications in the 1930s that introduced the surrealist movement to an American audience. Foremost amongst these were two exhibitions at the Julien Levy Gallery in 1932—"Surréalisme" and the artist's first solo photography exhibition in New York—and the illustration of two rayographs in Levy's pioneering 1936 publication *Surrealism*.[33] With five rayographs in the Museum of Modern Art's landmark 1936 exhibition "Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism"—one of which was selected to adorn the catalogue cover (fig. 102)—Man Ray was touted in the press as the "surrealist prophet" upon arrival in New York for the exhibition's opening.[34]

33 On the two exhibitions at the Julien Levy Gallery, see Ware and Barbarie, Nancy Hall-Duncan, "Surrealist Photography" (note 7), pp. 41–46 and pp. 63–65. In Julien Levy, *Surrealism* (New York: Black Sun Press, 1936), a pair of rayographs were reproduced as plates 37–38, unpaginated.

34 *Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism*, Alfred H. Barr Jr., ed., exh. cat. (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1936). According to the catalogue's checklist, Man Ray lent three rayographs, Tristan Tzara lent one, and another one was lent anonymously, p. 229. Following the exhibition, the museum

In the decades following Man Ray's initial experiments, the artist's growing body of rayographs slipped easily between overlapping artistic realms, peppered throughout a range of publications and exhibitions. "Cubism and Abstract Art," MoMA's precursor exhibition to "Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism" and an event largely considered key in establishing the museum's pedigree, featured two rayographs. Calling the artist "a pioneer in abstract photography," Barr writes in the accompanying catalogue that "many of [the rayographs] are in fact consummate works of art closely related to abstract painting and unsurpassed in their medium."[35] Barr's assessment was further reinforced by the appearance of three rayographs the next year in the museum's exhibition "Photography: 1839–1937," an event widely recognized as having produced the first major historical survey of the medium.[36]

Man Ray's rayographs followed a distinctive trajectory in narratives about the artist's protean creative practice, whether alongside or independent of his larger body of work in the photographic medium. Indeed, his rayographs are not incongruous even at exhibitions or in publications dedicated specifically to his paintings, objects, or films.[37] Notably, for example, the inclusion of a select group of rayographs in his retrospective at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art in 1966—which was clearly organized to draw attention to Man Ray's work in every medium other than photography—was apparently considered de rigueur.[38]

Half a century after the debut of Man Ray's rayographs—at a time when closer attention began to be paid to surrealist photography as a phenomenon in and of itself—a number of these inscrutable images were further insinuated through exhibitions into the surrealist paradigm and canonized in the United States within that framework. In the catalogue of the 1979–80 traveling exhibition "Photographic Surrealism," curator and author Nancy Hall-Duncan featured a 1923 rayograph as the opening plate, asserting that these "ghostlike traces of chance encounters of objects were among the photographic equivalents for the surrealist

---

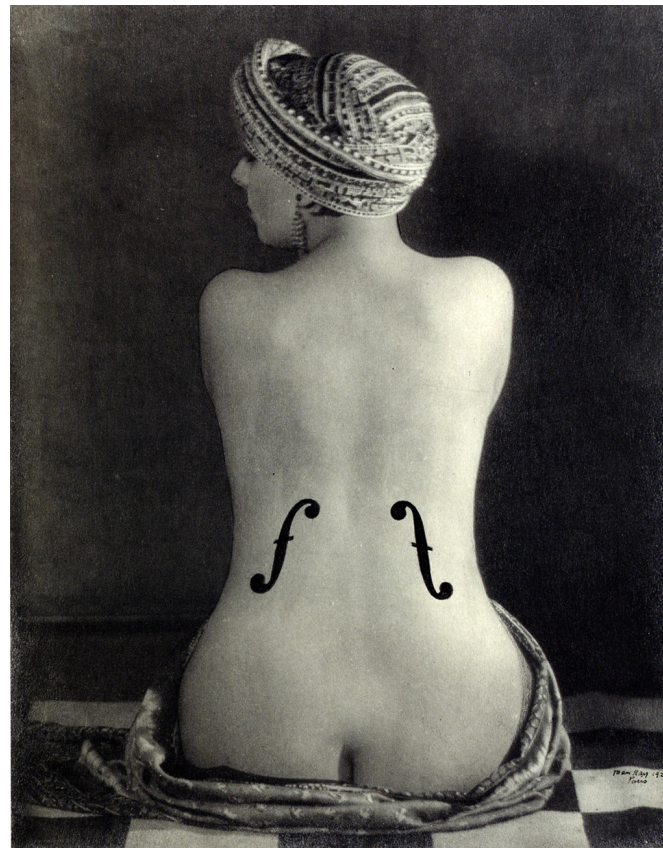
acquired one of the rayographs Man Ray lent (1923:252.1937). The celebration in the press of the arrival of Man Ray as the "surrealist prophet" is cited in Neil Baldwin, *Man Ray. American Artist* (Boston: Da Capo Press, 1988), p. 204.

35 *Cubism and Abstract Art*, Alfred H. Barr Jr., ed., exh. cat. (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1936), p. 170.

36 *Photography. 1839–1937*, Beaumont Newhall, ed., exh. cat. (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1937). The catalogue for this exhibition was for half a century the primary textbook used in teaching the history of photography. The fifth edition in 1982 was completely revised and enlarged and went through eleven printings, the last one in 2009. On this exhibition, see Allison Bertrand, "Beaumont Newhall's 'Photography 1839–1937' Making History," *History of Photography*, no. 21/2 (Summer 1997), pp. 137–146.

37 See de l'Écotais, *Man Ray rayographies* (note 22).

38 *Man Ray*, Jules Langsner, ed., exh. cat. (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art), 1966.



103 Man Ray, *Le Violon d'Ingres*, 1924, gelatin silver print, 48.2 × 36.8 cm. New York, Rosalind & Melvin Jacobs Collection. Courtesy Pace/MacGill Gallery, NYC.

technique of automatic writing."[39] The place of these works in the related discourse was cemented in "L'Amour Fou: Photography & Surrealism"—the 1985 exhibition at the Corcoran Gallery of Art in Washington, DC, that was a watershed for surrealist photography—with nine rayographs displayed and reproduced in the catalogue.[40] In Jane Livingston's catalogue essay "Man Ray and Surrealist Photography" (the only chapter dedicated to a single photographer), the author celebrates the artist as a "meta-surrealist," examining a range of his images that exemplified and even, like the rayographs, presaged key aspects of surrealist ideology.[41]

39 *Photographic Surrealism*, Nancy Hall-Duncan, ed., exh. cat. (Cleveland/New York: New Gallery of Contemporary Art, Cleveland, OH), 1979, p. 8.

40 *L'Amour fou. Surrealism and Photography*, Rosalind Krauss and Jane Livingston, eds., exh. cat. (Washington, DC: Corcoran Gallery of Art; New York: Abbeville Press, 1985), pp. 50 (figs. 41–42), 124–127 (figs. 113–115), 191 (fig. 169), 230–231 (figs. 224–225, 227).

41 Livingston, "Man Ray and Surrealist Photography," in ibid., pp. 113–147, here, p. 133.

Thus adopted as embodiments of the surrealist ethos and seen through the light of this movement in new scholarship, Man Ray's rayographs entered the nascent photographic art market in the 1970s and 1980s as standard-bearers of photographic surrealism and therefore closely bound to the reception of the movement. Perceptive photo aficionados avidly began to seek out these mysterious prints of undecipherable floating objects for their collections, a phenomenon reflected in the enduring demand for rayographs in the market.[42]

The unique quality and market value of Man Ray's rayographs are perhaps best revealed in his ingenious 1924 hybrid composition *Le Violon d'Ingres* (fig. 103), an image largely celebrated as one of the artist's most quintessential surrealist expressions that has no equal among his creations.[43] Morphing the body of his lover Kiki into a form evocative of both the odalisques of Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres and the French classical painter's musical instrument of choice, the artist created a visual and verbal pun on the French colloquialism for a hobby, *le violon d'Ingres*. With the curvilinear f-holes created by burning the shapes on the photographic paper through a hand-cut template, the original print was, in the artist's own words, "really a combination of photo and rayograph—an *original* like the rayograph."[44] As such, it is truly *sui generis*, defying constraints of the photo market. Indeed, as Man Ray scholar and dealer Francis Naumann rightly observes, "any discussion of the value of Man Ray photographs should take into consideration how his iconic works transcend the limitations imposed on a market by the medium. His *Violon d'Ingres*, for example, is not merely a photograph, but an icon of modern art, one that unquestionably transcends the photographic medium."[45] Given that the unique large-scale print of *Le Violon d'Ingres* has remained in a private New York collection since its initial acquisition in 1962 and few of the related prints have come to auction, the market potential for Man Ray's photography has yet to be fully tested.[46]

---

42 Among the top one hundred Man Ray photographs at auction listed on *artnet* (note 3), rayographs (including the *Champs Délicieux* and *Electricité* portfolios) account for thirty-six.

43 See Kirsten Hoving Powell, "*Le Violon d'Ingres*. Man Ray's Variations on Ingres, Deformation, Desire and de Sade," *Art History*, no. 23 (December 2003), pp. 772–799; and David Bate, "The Oriental Signifier," in *Photography and Surrealism. Sexuality, Colonialism and Social Dissent* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2004), pp. 112–144.

44 Letter from Man Ray to Rosalind and Melvin Jacobs, September 3, 1962, Rosalind and Melvin Jacobs Archives, New York.

45 Francis M. Naumann, personal correspondence, April 10, 2018. For a discussion of the history of this iconic work and an analysis of the original print, see Francis M. Naumann, "Man Ray's *Le Violon d'Ingres*, 1924"; and Paul Messier, "A Technical Analysis of *Le Violon d'Ingres*," in *The Long Arm of Coincidence: Selections from the Rosalind and Melvin Jacobs Collection*, exh. cat., Pace/MacGill Gallery, New York (Göttingen: Steidl, 2009), unpaginated.

46 This original print was acquired directly from the artist in 1962 by the astute New York collectors Rosalind and Melvin Jacobs. See *The Long Arm of Coincidence* (note 45) and *Sweet Dreams and*

Contextualizing the American reception of *Noire et blanche*

The trajectory of *Noire et blanche* similarly illustrates the changing signification of Man Ray's photographic works and their place within various art-historical narratives and discourses. Conceived in collaboration with American industrial designer George Sakier—the owner of the African mask featured in the image and an art director at Paris *Vogue* at the time—and debuting in 1926 in Paris *Vogue* (fig. 104), the photograph found its initial audience in the European fashion world rather than the international avant-garde or the art market.[47]

104 Paris *Vogue* 7, no. 5, 1926.

Nightmares. Dada and Surrealism from the Rosalind and Melvin Jacobs Collection, Bonnie Clearwater, ed., exh. cat. (North Miami: Museum of Contemporary Art, 2000). The interest in this composition led Man Ray to produce an edition of eight smaller prints (plus three artist's proofs) from a copy negative of the original in 1970, one of which sold at auction in 2005 for $135,509, almost twice its high estimate. "Photographs," auction cat., London, Sotheby's London, November 15, 2005, lot 76.

47 See Grossman and Manford, "Unmasking Man Ray's *Noire et blanche*" (note 1).

Although records for sale prices of *Noire et blanche* prior to the rise of a photographic market in the 1970s are scarce, there is no doubt that the price paid for this photograph over the past several decades is a far cry from what the work would have commanded in 1926, the year in which Doucet is presumed to have purchased his print.[48] While there is no account of what the French couturier paid for the photograph he acquired two years after purchasing Pablo Picasso's groundbreaking *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon*, records show that in 1922 he paid 200 French francs for Man Ray's study of *Femme renversée à la cigarette* and twenty-five francs each for two portraits of Francis Picabia.[49] The fashion designer was among a handful of prescient collectors and tastemakers at the time who saw beyond deep-seated biases concerning the value of the medium as a collectable commodity and unreservedly added photographic works to their art collections.

At the same time, it is likely that the initial prints Man Ray provided for reproduction in *Vogue* (May 1926), *Variétés* (July 1928), and *Art et Décoration* (November 1928) were perceived by the magazine editors as illustrative or ephemeral material more than art objects in their own right, and thus were handled with little regard to their financial value. In Man Ray's 1963 autobiography *Self Portrait*, he recounts with dismay his initial attempts at remuneration for his photographs. While "an editor of a literary and art magazine *took* [emphasis mine] some prints for publication," the editor of a fashion magazine "offered very little" for his fashion pictures, claiming that they were "free publicity for [the fashion designer] Poiret."[50] The perception that photographs submitted to mass publications for reproduction were ephemeral in nature is underscored by the fact that, once reproduced, they were frequently placed in the publication's archives or simply discarded rather than returned to the photographers who created them.

The compelling nature of the imagery of *Noire et blanche*—characteristically idiosyncratic and resistant to easy interpretation—helped make this one of Man Ray's best-known works and contributed to its phenomenal ascent at auction, even as debates persist over the meaning of this now canonical image. In the elegantly composed and multilayered interplay of the composition—organic with inorganic forms, black with white, light with shadow, European with African—Man Ray posited

48 See Phillippe Garner, "Man Ray's 'Noire et blanche' from the collection of Jacques Doucet," in "Stripped Bare. Photographs from the Collection of Thomas Koerfer," Christie's Paris, November 9, 2017, pp. 20–23.

49 Ibid., p. 22. On Doucet as art collector, see François Chapon, *Mystère et splendeurs de Jacques Doucet* (Paris: Jean-Claude Lattès, 1984).

50 Man Ray, *Self Portrait* (note 6), p. 131.

the disembodied white-painted face of his lover and muse Kiki (Alice Prin) and the darkly stained Baule-styled female portrait mask from the Ivory Coast as dialectical embodiments of the "ultramodern" and the "ultra-primitive." He thus invoked a formal and psychological dialogue between differentiation and parity, challenging fixed binary notions implied in the black-and-white photographic process itself.[51]

As I have argued elsewhere, the African mask featured in *Noire et blanche* carried different valences for American and European audiences, with meanings derived from distinctive relationships to fraught histories of colonialism and slavery and the manner in which such objects were employed by vanguard artists on either side of the Atlantic.[52] Captioned simply "Woman With A Mask" in the *New York Times* article announcing the exhibition at the Art Center in New York in March 1931 where the photograph had its American debut, it received none of the celebration of difference and exoticism extolled in the photograph's appearance in Paris *Vogue*. It was unceremoniously slipped in alongside modernist photographs by European luminaries such as Laszlo Moholy-Nagy, Herbert Bayer, Cecil Beaton, and Florence Henri in the full-page illustrated review of "The First Comprehensive Exhibition of Foreign Commercial Photography, Representing Fifty Leading Photographers of Eight European Nations."[53] By representing Man Ray within this framework, the exhibition ironically—and no doubt inadvertently—circumvented the virtual embargo of his photographic work by the self-designated gatekeepers of modernist photography in the United States, even as

51 The ambiguous and provocative nature of the image is reflected in the range of interpretations it has evoked and its unstable place in art-historical narratives over the past century. Simultaneously celebrated and disparaged for embedded critical issues of race, gender, and representation, *Noire et blanch*e has become a paradigmatic symbol of modernism and its inherent irresolvable contradictions. It has been construed alternately as an extension of the early modernist impulse to universalize and neutralize difference, as a reflection of contemporary attitudes toward race and gender, or simply as formalist interplay. See Livingston, "Man Ray and Surrealist Photography" (note 41); Whitney Chadwick, "Fetishizing Fashion/Fetishizing Culture. Man Ray's *Noire et blanche*," *Oxford Art Journal*, no. 18/2, 1995, pp. 3–17; and Alexandre Castant, *Noire et blanche de Man Ray* (Paris: Éditions Scala, 2003). Among the unarguably most notable roles *Noire et blanche* has played in contemporary discourse is its promotion as the photographic paragon of the modernist primitivist enterprise, prominently featured in scholarship over the past several decades on the appropriation of non-Western objects by Western artists. See Marianne Torgovnick, *Gone Primitive* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), pp. 34–36; David Bate, "Black Object, White Subject," in *Photography and Surrealism* (note 43), pp. 172–202; and Wendy A. Grossman, *Man Ray, African Art, and the Modernist Lens* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), pp. 2–4; 29; 129–131.

52 See Grossman, *Man Ray*, ibid.

53 "The First Comprehensive Exhibition of Foreign Commercial Photography, Representing Fifty Leading Photographers of Eight European Nations," *New York Times*, March 1931, p. 107. According to the short caption accompanying the photo essay, the exhibition was assembled by Abbott Kimball of Lyddon, Hanford and Kimball, an advertising agency in New York.

it obfuscated his nationality and further blurred lines between art and commercial uses of the medium.[54]

Despite the not uncommon perception today that "*Noire et blanche* is a photograph exemplary of surrealist art,"[55] its place in the reception of surrealism either in Europe or the United States was far from a *fait accompli*. While the photograph's dreamlike quality, disembodied heads, and incongruous juxtapositions led to an ahistorical characterization of the work as emblematic of the surrealist movement in scholarship over the past several decades, the photograph initially was largely an outlier in surrealist activities. With the exception of its reproduction in the Belgian avant-garde journal *Variétés* (July 1928) and inclusion in the "Exposition Minotaure" at the Palais des Beaux-Arts in Brussels in 1934, there is little trace of the photograph's presence in surrealist pursuits in Europe or the United States between the wars.[56]

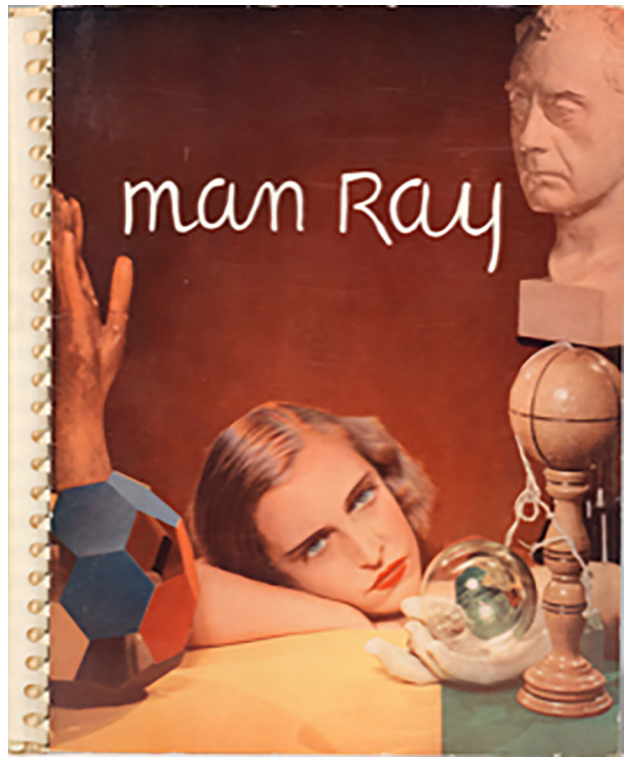
Indeed, *Noire et blanch*e remained largely outside conventional narratives of surrealism until relatively recently. Consequently, the photograph is totally unaccounted for on the pages of some of the most influential exhibitions and publications on surrealism in the United States over the course of the twentieth century. Unlike the artist's rayographs, *Noire et blanch*e is nowhere to be found in the catalogue for MoMA's 1936 "Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism" exhibition. Nor would it appear in the museum's subsequent exhibition and accompanying catalogue, William Rubin's *Dada, Surrealism and Their Heritage* (1968). Rubin similarly overlooked this photograph in his ensuing exhaustive tome, *Dada and Surrealist Art* (1985).[57] One might find these curatorial and editorial decisions particularly surprising given that MoMA has in its own collection one of the rare and historically most significant prints of *Noire et blanch*e, which (as discussed below) was gifted to them in 1940 by James Thrall Soby in a bequest that included a significant number of Man Ray's most iconic photographs.

54 In another ironic turn three-quarters of a century later, it was this composition that was chosen by the United States Postal Service in 2013 to represent Man Ray in its "Modern Art in America" stamp series. See "U.S. Postal Service Dedicates Modern Art in America, 1913–1931 Forever Stamps," U.S. Postal Service, March 7, 2013, http://about.usps.com/news/national-releases/2013/pr13_033.htm, accessed March 14, 2018. Full disclosure: I was consulted on the selection of the photograph to represent Man Ray for this series.

55 Man Ray, *Noire et blanche*, 1926, toned gelatin silver print, mounted on plywood, Amsterdam, *Stedelijk Museum*, https://www.stedelijk.nl/en/collection/18827-man-ray-noire-et-blanche, accessed February 7, 2018.

56 It is, however, interesting that the Belgian Surrealist E. L. T. Mesens acquired a print of *Noire et blanche*, perhaps the one exhibited in Brussels in 1934. Mesens's print was acquired by the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam in 1981. See note 2.

57 Barr, *Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism* (note 34); William Rubin, *Dada, Surrealism and Their Heritage* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1968); William Rubin, *Dada and Surrealist Art* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1985).



105 Cover of Man Ray, *Man Ray. Photographs 1920–1934*, Hartford, CT, 1934.

The institutionalization of Man Ray's photographs

Soby, the writer and art collector who was introduced to Man Ray by Julien Levy in 1933, collaborated with the artist a year later to publish the first monograph of his work in this medium, *Photographs by Man Ray 1920 Paris 1934* (fig. 105), advancing him the money to have the volume printed.[58] Artfully produced under Man Ray's direction, the large-format, spiral-bound publication featured eighty-four of what have become some of the artist's most emblematic photographs—including *Noire et blanche* and nineteen rayographs. The five thematic sections each opened with poetry and essays (in both English and French) by leading figures of the Dada and surrealist movements.[59]

Lewis Mumford's review of *Photographs by Man Ray 1920 Paris 1934* in the *New Yorker* was decidedly unenthusiastic about Man Ray's

58 Man Ray, *Photographs by Man Ray 1920 Paris 1934* (Hartford, CT: James Thrall Soby/Paris: Cahiers d'art, 1934).

59 Contributors were André Breton, Paul Éluard, Marcel Duchamp (written under his famous pseudonym "Rrose Sélavy"), and Tristan Tzara.

experimental engagement with the photographic medium. "Living in Paris," the literary critic began, "Man Ray has become slightly legendary. Those who wish to preserve the legend should not look into the book of photographs by him, 1920–1934, published by James Thrall Soby at Hartford."[60] Echoing derogatory sentiments about Man Ray's photographs expressed over a decade earlier by de Zayas, Mumford characterizes the artist as "an extremely adroit technician, who has done almost everything with a camera except use it to take photographs. … I cannot think of a single trick anyone has done during the last fifteen years that Man Ray does not show in this book, and for all I know, he may have done the trick first."[61] Mumford's critical view notwithstanding, the publication has become an essential primary source of great historical and market value. First editions in good condition sell for close to $4,000, while Dover Publication's 1980 facsimile reprint version still remains in print.

Soby utilized many of the same images in the publication to organize an exhibition in 1934 at the Wadsworth Atheneum where he served as a consultant, an endeavor partly intended to help promote the book. Under the leadership of visionary director Chick Austin, as Oliver Tostmann discusses in his essay in this volume, the museum had become a beacon for modern art. It not only mounted the first show of surrealist art in the United States in 1931 but also produced a number of notable events in 1934. In addition to Man Ray's exhibition, the Wadsworth Atheneum held the first major Picasso retrospective, debuted the world premiere of Gertrude Stein and Virgil Thomson's opera *Four Saints in Three Acts*, and *Serenade*, the first ballet George Balanchine choreographed in America, was performed in the museum's theater.

In the wake of these events, Man Ray's two-week exhibition from October 15 to November 1 has received curiously little attention.[62] The only evidence of the show in the museum's own archives is a calendar listing in their bulletin and a clipping of a review in the local Hartford newspaper.[63] Headlined "Photographs by Man Ray / Comprehensive Exhibition of the Parisian's Experimental Work," the article provides a measured review of the exhibition. The newspaper's drama critic,

60 Lewis Mumford, "The Art Galleries, Critics and Cameras," *New Yorker*, September 29, 1934, pp. 49–51. Man Ray's response to what he saw as Mumford's "ill-informed review" was sent to the *New Yorker* but never published. See Man Ray, letter to the editor, *New Yorker*, October 12, 1934. Reprinted in Mundy, *Man Ray* (note 12), pp. 122–124.

61 Mumford, "The Art Galleries" (note 60), pp. 49–51.

62 An exhibition and publication in progress by Man Ray research scholar Steven Manford is anticipated to redress this lacuna.

63 Wadsworth Atheneum, ed., "Report for 1933 and Bulletin Vol. XII, No. 2, October–December 1934," p. 39, Archives of the Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, Connecticut.

T. H. Parker, writes, "Man Ray's abstractions and hyperrealist photographs you will like or dislike largely in accord with your reactions to abstraction and surrealisme [*sic*] in themselves. It is apparent from Man Ray's own preface to the book … that the photographer is thoroughly 'simpatico' to both."[64] Following an overview of the work in the show, the article draws attention to the section featuring what is called "Man Ray's ingenuity photographically, and his interesting experiments in X-ray and other pioneering paths."[65] The mischaracterization of the rayographs as "experiments in X-ray" notwithstanding, the author's appreciation of this aspect of Man Ray's work is reflected in the observation that "This section of the exhibit … best typifies the onward and upward movement in contemporary photography and in retrospect may someday stand as the beginning of new vistas in this medium."[66]

In 1940, Soby made a bequest to the Museum of Modern Art of the Man Ray photographs he had acquired through working with the artist.[67] This resulted in the museum acquiring one of the most important collections of the artist's photographs to this day, including a print of *Noire et blanche* and a number of his most celebrated rayographs. Soby was to have a long and significant relationship with the museum, serving in various capacities from committee member, curator, adviser, department chair, to trustee over the course of almost three decades. Appointed to the museum's Acquisitions and Photography committees the same year he gifted Man Ray's photographs, he stood in a unique position to shape the reception and narrative of the artist's work. Nonetheless, Soby's interests appear to have been mainly directed elsewhere, including his writing and curatorial activities related to his major collection of contemporary painting. This is reflected in the 1961 exhibition and publication *The James Thrall Soby Collection of Works of Art Pledged or Given to the Museum of Modern Art*, whereas the earlier bequest of Man Ray's photographs was only mentioned in passing in Alfred Barr's introductory text.[68] Not included in either the exhibited or illustrated works, Man Ray's photographs were totally ignored in the celebration of Soby's activities with the museum.

64 T. H. Parker, "Avery Shows Photographs by Man Ray/Comprehensive Exhibition of Parisian's Experimental Work Opens Art Museum Today," *Hartford Courant*, October 15, 1934, p. 117.

65 Wadsworth Atheneum, "Report" (note 63), p.39.

66 Ibid.

67 See "Photographs from the Collection of the Museum of Modern Art," auction cat., New York, Sotheby's New York, October 22–23, 2002, p. 26.

68 Alfred H. Barr Jr., "James Thrall Soby and his Collection," in *The James Thrall Soby Collection of Works of Art Pledged or Given to the Museum of Modern Art*, exh. cat. (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1961), pp. 15–20, here p. 19.

The Museum of Modern Art's outsized role in creating a genealogy of surrealism in the United States within the framework of its shifting narratives of modernism has been studiously examined, most notably by Sandra Zalman in *Consuming Surrealism in American Culture*.[69] In a similar vein, the museum has been instrumental in "[t]he cultural transformation of photography into a museum art," occupying for the majority of the twentieth century what Christopher Phillips characterizes as the "Judgment Seat of Photography."[70] The museum assumed this mantle in 1937 with the exhibition "Photography: 1839–1937," which "signaled MoMA's recognition that implicit in photography's adoption by the European avant-garde was a new outlook on the whole spectrum of photographic applications."[71] This exhibition and accompanying publication provided for most of the twentieth century a decisive voice in defining the history of this medium, as Phillips notes, "along lines consistent with the conventional aims of the art museum."[72] The manner in which the museum has situated—or sidelined—Man Ray's photographs within its various narratives of modernism, surrealism, and photographic history is rooted in the overlaps or tensions between its institutionalization of these related narratives.

While many of Man Ray's most radical images that helped shape the ethos of surrealist photography have been ignored in the various narratives of modernism the museum has constructed, his rayographs appear to have conveniently lent themselves to multiple interpretations at the nexus of Dada, surrealism, and modern art. Featured in the series of didactic exhibitions and publications launched in 1936 by "Cubism and Abstract Art," followed by "Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism," and capped with "Photography: 1839–1937," Man Ray's rayographs emerge as a notable link between those events. *Noire et blanche*, on the other hand, has had a less illustrious history within the museum's early efforts in constructing its narratives on modernism.[73]

Not surprisingly, MoMA's vision for what constituted museum-worthy photographic art did not, in many respects, align with the transgressive photographs most appreciated by Man Ray's surrealist peers and prominently featured in their publications. Indeed, the artist's iconoclastic approach to the medium, which he embraced for its conceptual rather than representational qualities, was largely at odds with the ideas

69 Zalman, "Another Lens" (note 8).

70 Christopher Phillips, "The Judgment Seat of Photography," *October*, no. 22 (Autumn 1982), pp. 27–63, here p. 28.

71 Newhall, *Photography. 1839–1937* (note 36); Phillips, ibid., p. 32.

72 Phillips, ibid., p. 33.

73 Although *Noire et blanche* appeared in the early editions of *Photography. 1839–1937*, somewhere between then and the printing of the fifth revised and enlarged edition in 1982, it disappeared.

about photography as fine art being promoted by MoMA for most of the twentieth century. Despite the museum's trove of some of the artist's most iconic works, it has never held a major Man Ray exhibition or published a monograph of its stellar collection of his photographs.[74] To the contrary, these lacunae and the periodic de-acquisition of his photographs from its collection leave one wondering about its commitment to promoting the artist or, at the very least, its appraisal of photographic surrealism and his important contribution to this phenomenon.[75]

A Hollywood ending

In the three decades following Soby's bequest of Man Ray's photographs to MoMA, the artist's photographic career took a back seat to other events and activities in his life. Forced to flee Paris in the face of the German occupation, he settled in Hollywood where he spent a decade focused on advancing his reputation as a painter and downplaying the photographic activities he feared were eclipsing that goal.[76] Nonetheless, he notably included both a selection of rayographs and a print of *Noire et blanche* (titled here *Composition*) in his exhibition in 1941 at the Frank Perls Gallery in Los Angeles, his first exhibition since returning to the United States.[77]

Although Man Ray at no time abandoned photography, the medium would never again become the principal métier in his creative practice, even as it continued to define his reputation in the art world and the market. Fortunately, most of the work he had left behind in

74 Upon Man Ray's death in Paris on November 18, 1976, MoMA hastily mounted an undocumented exhibition of a selection of his work from November 18 to December 7. The only recorded exhibition of Man Ray's photographs linked to the Soby bequest was relegated to a curatorial fellow and, according the museum's press release "Man Ray's Radical Experimentation in Photograph is Explored" (in which the artist's birth name is misspelled as Rudnitzky), took place from March 16 to August 22, 2000. No publication accompanied the exhibition: https://www.moma.org/documents/moma_press-release_387011.pdf, accessed November 29, 2017.

75 "Photographs from the Collection of the Museum of Modern Art," auction cat., New York, Sotheby's New York, October 22–23, 2002, Lots 17–24, 26; "Photographs Including Property from the Museum of Modern Art," auction cat., New York, Christie's New York, October 10, 2017, Lots 154–155.

76 See Merry Foresta, "Exile in Paradise. Man Ray in Hollywood, 1940–1951," in *Perpetual Motif. The Art of Man Ray*, Merry Foresta, ed., exh. cat. (Washington, DC: National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution/New York: Abbeville Press, 1988), pp. 273–309; Dickran Tashjian, "'A Clock that Forgets to Run Down.' Man Ray in Hollywood," in *Man Ray Paris-LA*, Pilar Perez, ed., exh. cat. (Los Angeles: Track 16 Gallery/Robert Berman Gallery), 1996, pp. 13–113.

77 Frank Perls Papers and Frank Perls Gallery Records, *ca.* 1920–1983, AAA. Baldwin (*Man Ray. American Artist*, note 34, p. 239) notes that this "was the first of many Man Ray exhibitions in California yielding no commercial benefit."

France survived the war, as the artist gratefully discovered during his short reconnaissance trip to Paris in 1947. He returned to his adopted city in 1951, welcomed by the French as an *éminence grise* of the prewar avant-garde. Even so, as he lamented to Arnold Crane during one of the Chicago lawyer's 1968 visits, he had few buyers willing to pay the $100 price tag he was then insisting on for his photographic prints.[78]

Crane's collection, which grew over the next decade and a half to be one of the most significant collections of modern photography in private hands in the United States, was one of nine international collections that the Getty Museum in Los Angeles acquired in a stealth purchase in 1984. A game-changing event that transformed the photographic landscape, the acquisition valued at $20 million was touted in the press as "the single largest purchase in the history of the burgeoning international photography market."[79] Securing Crane's collection, which included 175 photographs by Man Ray acquired over the course of the collector's friendship with the artist in his last years, was a particular coup for the museum with an important impact on the artist's legacy.[80] Combined with photographs from the Sam Wagstaff collection procured in the same mass acquisition and additional purchases by the museum, the three-hundred-plus photographic works by Man Ray in the Getty's collection today have made it unrivaled in the United States for its depth and quality.[81]

One year after the remarkable Getty acquisition, the exhibition"L'Amour Fou: Photography & Surrealism" provided not only a watershed moment for surrealist photography in general but also for Man Ray's photographs in particular. Advocating for the aesthetic merits of surrealist photography within a larger critique of the formalist biases of modernist art history, the exhibition played a key role in putting the photographic activities of surrealism back on the map. And the photographer most prominently featured in this endeavor was Man Ray, commanding not only the catalogue cover and extensive representation but also a dedicated chapter.

It was not only the artist's rayographs, as mentioned previously, that benefitted from treatment in "L'Amour Fou." The display of positive

78 In the taped conversation, Man Ray stated that unless people were willing to purchase a photograph for what they would pay for a drawing or watercolor, he wasn't interested in selling. Man Ray, interview by Arnold Crane, June 12, 1968, AAA.

79 Jeffrey Hogrefe and Paul Richard, "Getty Gets the Pictures. Photo Collections Valued at $20 Million Purchased by the Museum," *Washington Post*, June 8, 1984, p. B1.

80 On Crane's collection, see *Photo Graphics. From the Collection of Arnold H. Crane*, exh. cat. (Milwaukee: Milwaukee Art Center, 1973). See also Crane's photographs of Man Ray and short text on the artist, Arnold H. Crane, *On the Other Side of the Camera* (Cologne: Könemann, 1997).

81 *The Thrill of the Chase. The Wagstaff Collection of Photographs at the J. Paul Getty Museum*, Paul Martineau, ed., exh. cat. (Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2016).

and negative versions of *Noire et blanche* and their reproduction across a two-page spread in the exhibition catalogue provided a definitive repositioning of this work within contemporary narratives and discourses of surrealism.[82] Indeed, this pairing would be picked up five years later in an exhibition on surrealist art at the University of California Art Museum, Berkeley, that drew on the earlier source.[83] That the photograph's newfound fame coincided with a synergistic relationship between an expanding photographic market and a renewed interest in surrealism is hardly coincidental. Ironically, however, Livingston argued in her essay that *Noire et blanche* was an example of how "Some of Man Ray's most celebrated surrealist photographs prove, on reflection, to be among his least successful."[84] If one is to search for prime examples of a disconnect between the evaluations of art historians and the art market, we need look no further.

Ensuing exhibitions and high-profile auction sales—most notably the Smithsonian Institution's 1988–89 traveling show, "Perpetual Motif," and Sotheby's 1995 Man Ray Estate auction—have served to introduce a new generation to the artist, whose unorthodox approach to art-making and radical use of the photographic medium seem to resonate with today's postmodernist sensibilities.[85] Currently, with collectors freshly primed for rare prints by Man Ray, the artist continues to ascend to the top of the auction leader board in the "classic" or pre-digital photography category with three photographs surpassing the million-dollar mark. Sales of his photographs persist in breaking records even as the photography market itself has ostensibly reached a plateau.[86]

This exegesis detailing historical factors that shaped the reception of and market for Man Ray's photographic work in the United States is only a microscopic slice of a larger story yet to be told, one with more variables in the medium, the message, and the tastemakers than can be

82 Livingston, "Man Ray and Surrealist Photography" (note 41), here pp. 138–139 (figs. 123–124).

83 *Anxious Visions. Surrealist Art*, Sidra Stich, ed., exh. cat. (Berkeley: University Art Museum, 1990), p. 59.

84 Livingston, "Man Ray and Surrealist Photography" (note 41), here p. 125.

85 *Perpetual Motif*, 1988 (note 76); Sotheby's London, *Man Ray. Paintings, Objects, Photographs. Property from the Estate of Juliet Man Ray, the Man Ray Trust and the Family of Juliet Man Ray*, March 22–23, 1995, Sale 5173.

86 Less than six months prior to this record-breaking sale, yet another Man Ray photographic print broke the unprecedented $2 million record, this time a little-known hand-colored vintage print of a tearful woman, once owned by Robert Mapplethorpe. Third on the list is a rayograph sold at auction in 2013. "The Price Database," *artnet*, https://www.artnet.com/price-database/, accessed November 22, 2017.
According to an *artnet* news analysis from April 2018, after reaching a peak in 2013, "the photography market has come full circle to its 2010 levels." Tim Schneider, "How Far Has the Photography Market Really Come?" *artnet*, no. 19 (April 2018), https://news.artnet.com/market/photography-market-data-1269191, accessed April 19, 2018.

fully accounted for here.[87] What has been demonstrated through this investigation into the discursive contexts over the past century framing his rayographs and *Noire et blanche* is how the oscillating reception of the artist's work in the photographic trade was integrally connected to shifts in the status of photography within the market for surrealist art. Examining these works at the nexus of histories of photography, surrealism, institutional collecting practices, and auction results, we gain a greater appreciation of the forces that shaped this market for his work both historically and today.

87 Indeed, while the artist made over 14,500 negatives, only a few of the resultant photographs have achieved the iconic status of those considered within this essay's selective framework. A perusal of the photographs on the list of the one hundred top prices for works sold at auction holds few surprises. In addition to prints of *Noire et blanche* and an array of rayographs (both individual prints and the *Champs Délicieux* and *Électricité* portfolios), demand for Man Ray's work doesn't stray far outside the confines of rare prints of other iconic works such as *Larmes* (Glass Tears) and some of the best-known solarized portraits and female nudes.